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ABSTRACT

This study examined differences between kindergarten and first-grade children identified as at risk (AR) or not at risk (NAR) for the development of severe emotional disturbance on selected factors of classroom dynamics. Screening, using the Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders measure, of all 628 kindergarten and first-grade children at two Florida elementary schools resulted in identification of 108 students at risk for development of serious emotional disturbance. Comparison focused on teacher factors, classroom interactions, student factors, and instructional factors. Both statistical and qualitative procedures were employed to analyze data. Results indicated that AR students experienced a markedly different reality in the classroom than their NAR peers. Four major findings emerged: (1) AR students were generally rejected by their teachers while NAR peers were not; (2) AR students received significantly more negative or neutral and non-academic teacher feedback statements than NAR peers; (3) AR students spent significantly less time academically engaged than NAR peers; and (4) teachers made few accommodations for these students and were generally resistant to making adjustments in tasks, materials, or teaching methods to meet the individual needs of AR students. However, AR and NAR students did not differ significantly in the number of initiating or receiving social interactions from peers or in their positive perceptions of teachers' expectations. (Contains 33 references.) (DB)

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ED 397 601

Classroom Dynamics and Young Children Identified as At Risk for the Development of Serious Emotional Disturbance.

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All kindergarten and first grade students in two urban Dade County Public schools (DCPS) were screened for the purpose of identifying students who are at risk for the development of serious emotional disturbance (SED). The students at the two schools were screened for at-risk status as part of a larger University of Miami research study, Project SUCCESS (McKinney, Montague & Hocutt, 1994). This project is a four-year longitudinal study to investigate the prevention of SED in young children with behavioral and emotional problems. Project objectives include: (a) identification of students who are at risk for behavioral and emotional problems, but have not yet been referred for special education evaluation, (b) development of comprehensive interventions for students identified, and (c) assessment of identified students annually over four years to determine if there is a change in risk status.

The schools were purposefully selected because they had adopted a full-service school model and the ethnic composition (7% Anglo, 41% Black Non-Hispanic, 51% Hispanic and 1% Asian/Native American) of the student population at both schools (N = 2,293) is representative of the ethnic diversity that is found in DCPS. The full-service school model is an effort by the State of Florida to address some of the issues of "high risk" status that a significant number of the state's public school students and their families face. Characteristics associated with children and their families identified as "high-risk", and served by the full-service school, include physical and sexual abuse, substance abuse, neglect, homelessness and medical complications.

Students were screened using the Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders (SSBD; Walker & Severson, 1992). The SSBD is a comprehensive, multiple-gated mass screening

instrument developed to identify elementary-aged general education students who are at-risk for developing behavioral and emotional problems. SSBD screening is accomplished in three stages which include teacher judgement and direct observations of student behaviors. The SSBD is appropriate for all students in general education classrooms, and each child has an equal chance of being identified. The SSBD multi-gated screening process allows the identification of students who are at three levels of relative risk for SED (i.e., low, moderate, and high).

During the first year of Project SUCCESS, project personnel utilized the SSBD to screen all 628 kindergarten and first grade students at the two schools. Stage I SSBD screening included a one-hour workshop at each school for all kindergarten and first-grade teachers. Teachers were familiarized with definitions of behavioral and emotional problems and were given SSBD Stage I forms to identify 20 students in their class who most closely matched definitions presented. For Stage II, teachers completed the SSBD Critical Events Checklist and the Combined Frequency Index for Adaptive and Maladaptive Behavior Rating Scales for each of the top ten ranked students. The Critical Events Checklist lists 33 common symptoms of behavior problems and for each of the top rated students teachers check behaviors which have occurred during the present school year. The Combined Frequency Index for Adaptive and Maladaptive Behavior Rating Scale measures the occurrence of positive and undesirable classroom behavior for the top rated students. For Stage III, students were observed by trained project personnel using the SSBD observation procedure for classroom and playground observations. A population of 108 students was identified as being at moderate or high risk for the development of SED.

Academic and behavioral outcomes for children are mediated by interactions with classroom environments (Fraser & Fisher, 1983; Marshall, 1987; Stipek & Daniels, 1988) and the assessment of a student's classroom environment yields rich data that allow better understanding of student outcomes and provide guidance for sound interventions (MacIver, 1988). To better understand and assist these young children identified as at high risk for the development of SED, it was important to assess classroom factors that may be precipitating or supporting behavioral and/or learning problems. From a total of 22 first- and second-grade teachers at both schools, 13 teachers were randomly selected to participate in this study. One student at high risk (AR) and a matched student who was not-at-risk (NAR) were selected for each teacher in the sample. Selection of a matched not-at-risk student for each class included selecting all students in the class not identified as at risk for the development of SED and matching these students with the selected AR student on gender, age, ethnicity and language dominance.

Educational research has identified classroom dynamics as an important variable related to school learning (Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1990). Classroom dynamics includes factors such as teachers' attitudes towards and perceptions of students, student-teacher interactions, peer social interactions, students' classroom behavior, students' academic engaged time, students' perceptions of teachers' expectations and instructional accommodations made for students by teachers and these factors may contribute as much as formal instruction to a child's overall classroom performance (Dudek, Strobel & Runco, 1993). The following areas were examined in this investigation of classroom dynamics:

1. teacher factors: attitudes and perceptions;

2. classroom interactions: student-teacher and peer social interactions during instructional and classroom activities;

3. student factors: academic engaged time and student perceptions of teacher expectations; and

4. instructional factors: accommodations made by teachers for AR students in their classroom.

The following questions were addressed in this investigation of classroom dynamics:

Teacher attitudes towards and perceptions of children:

1. What are teacher attitudes toward and perceptions of students identified as at risk (AR) for the development of SED in contrast to a not-at-risk (NAR) group?

Student-Teacher Interactions:

2. Are there differences between AR and NAR children in the number of positive and negative student-initiating behaviors with teachers?

3. Are there differences in the number and quality of teacher feedback statements to AR and NAR students?

4. Are there differences in the frequency of response opportunities for AR and NAR students?

Peer Social Interactions:

5. Are there differences between AR and NAR children in the number of initiated positive and negative social interactions with their peers?

6. Are there differences between AR and NAR children in the number of positive and negative social interactions received from peers?

Academic Engaged Time:

7. Are there differences between AR and NAR children in the percentage of academic engaged time?

Children's perceptions of teachers:

8. Do AR children's perception of their teachers' expectations differ from NAR

children?

Teaching Accommodations:

9. What teaching methods do general education teachers use to accommodate students identified as at risk for the development of SED?

Both statistical and qualitative procedures were employed to analyze data. Data from instruments measuring teachers' perceptions of students' ideal pupil attributes, students' academic engaged time and students' perceptions of teachers' expectations were analyzed using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) between-groups design. The level of analysis of classroom interaction data was quantity and quality of communications interactions between teacher and student and student and peers. Classroom interaction data were analyzed using a one-way ANOVA and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) between-group designs. Qualitative procedures were employed to analyze descriptive data collected on teachers' attitudes toward AR and NAR students and teachers' accommodations for AR students. Data gathered with Silberman's (1969) interview format on differential teacher attitudes toward AR and NAR students were examined to identify attachment, concerned, indifference, or rejected AR or NAR students. Qualitative descriptions of teachers' instructional accommodations for AR students, as they are listed on the TIES-II Instructional Accommodation Component, were analyzed.

Teacher Attitudes and Perceptions

Question 1: What are teacher attitudes towards and perceptions of children identified as at risk (AR) for the development of SED in contrast to a not-at-risk (NAR) group?

Nine of the 13 teachers in the sample completed the Silberman (1969) Teachers'

Attitude Interview for a 69% return rate. The purpose of this interview was to identify teacher attitudes and feelings of attachment, concern, indifference and rejection toward students in their classroom. Teachers not completing the interview stated that they felt "uncomfortable" with the instrument, particularly with selecting students for the rejection category. Of the nine teachers completing the interview, five teachers named the AR student in their classroom in the rejected category; no NAR students were named in the rejected category. One teacher named the AR student in her classroom in the concern category, and one teacher named the NAR student in her classroom in the concern category. Results of the interview indicated that AR students were generally rejected by their classroom teacher and their NAR peers were not.

Data were gathered on teachers' perception of AR and NAR students using Kornblau's (1982) The Teachable Pupil Survey. The purpose of this survey was to objectively measure teachers' perceptions' of AR and NAR students' "ideal pupil" attributes. A one-way ANOVA between-groups design yielded a significant effect for group, F (1,24) = 20.86; p < .001. Teachers rated AR students significantly lower on ideal pupil attributes than their NAR peers (AR M = 31.38, SD = 10.86; NAR M = 51.07, SD = 11.12).

Student-Teacher Interactions

Data on student-teacher interactions of AR and NAR students in the sample were gathered using Irvine's (1986) modified version of the Brophy-Good Dyadic Interaction System. The purpose of this observational instrument was to gather quantitative data on student-teacher interactions in the following areas: (a) student-initiating behaviors, (b) teacher feedback statements, and (c) student's public response opportunities.

2. Are there differences between AR and NAR students in the number of positive and negative student-initiating behaviors?

A one-way ANOVA between-groups design revealed no significant effect for group, F (1,24) = 2.84; p = .10 (AR M = 4.92, SD = 3.37; NAR M = 3.0, SD = 2.34).

3. Are there differences in the number and quality of teacher feedback statements to AR and NAR students?

Analysis using a one-way ANOVA between-groups design revealed a significant effect for group, F(1,24) = 8.79; p = .007. AR students received significantly more teacher feedback statements than their NAR peers (AR M = 8.85, SD = 4.70; NAR M = 4.23, SD = 3.06). Because a significant effect was found for group in total number of teacher feedback statements, further analysis were conducted to determine the quality (positive, negative, or neutral; academic or non-academic) of statements to AR and NAR students.

Data were analyzed using a one-way MANOVA, between-groups design. The analysis revealed a moderate, but statistically significant multivariate effect for group, Wilks' lambda = .57, F (3, 22) = 5.6; p = .005.

Results of the univariate ANOVAs were as follows:

1. For positive teacher feedback statements, no significant effect was found for group, F (1,24) = 0.08, p = .77 (AR M = 2.08, SD = 2.90; NAR M = 1.77, SD = 2.52).

2. For negative teacher feedback statements, a significant effect was found for group, F (1,24) = 6.41, p = .018. AR students received significantly more negative teacher feedback statements than their NAR peers (AR M = 2.15, SD = 2.82; NAR M = 0.15, SD = 0.37).

3. For neutral teacher feedback statements, a significant effect was found for group, $F(1,24) = 11.25$, $p = .003$. AR students received significantly more neutral teacher feedback statements than their NAR peers (AR $M = 4.61$, $SD = 1.80$; NAR $M = 2.31$, $SD = 1.70$).

Analysis of teacher feedback data was conducted to determine if there was a difference in the number of academic and non-academic teacher feedback statements to AR and NAR students. Using a one-way MANOVA, between-groups design, the analysis revealed a moderate, but statistically significant multivariate effect for group, Wilks' lambda = .76, F (3, 22) = 3.6; $p < .05$. Results of the univariate ANOVAs were as follows:

1. For academic teacher feedback statements, no significant effect was found for group, F (1,24) = 1.43, $p = .24$ (AR $M = 3.84$, $SD = 3.53$; NAR $M = 2.38$, $SD = 2.63$).

2. For non-academic teacher feedback statements, a significant effect was found for group, F (1,24) = 4.37, $p = .047$. AR students received significantly more non-academic teacher feedback statements than their NAR peers (AR $M = 5.77$, $SD = 4.00$; NAR $M = 2.61$, $SD = 3.69$).

4. Are there differences in the frequencies of response opportunities for AR and NAR students?

Analysis using a one-way ANOVA between-groups design failed to reveal a significant effect for group, F (1,24) = 0.59; $p = .449$ (AR $M = 0.54$, $SD = 0.97$; NAR $M = 0.85$, $SD = 1.07$).

Peer Social Interactions

Data on social initiating behaviors of AR and NAR students were gathered using Gresham's (1982) categories of students' classroom social interactions. The purpose of this

observational system was to gather quantitative data on AR and NAR students' rates of initiating and receiving positive and negative social interactions in the classroom.

5. Are there differences bet ween AR and NAR students in the number of initiating positive and negative social interactions?

A one-way ANOVA between-groups design did not reveal a significant effect for group, F (1,24) = 2.84; p = .12 (AR M = 5.00, SD = 2.74; NAR M = 3.23, SD = 2.83).

6. Are there differences between AR and NAR students in the number of positive and negative social interactions received from peers?

A one-way ANOVA between-groups design did not reveal a significant effect for group, F (1,24) = 1.59; p = .22 (AR M = 4.00, SD = 3.05; NAR M = 6.07, SD = 5.09).

Students' Academic Engaged Time

Data on academic engaged time (AET) for AR and NAR students in the sample were gathered using the classroom observation instrument for AET found in the Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorder (Walker & Severson, 1992).

7. Are there differences between AR and NAR students in the percentage of academic engaged time?

A one-way ANOVA between-groups design revealed a significant effect for group, F (1,24) = 9.17; p = .0058. AR students spent significantly less time academically engaged than their NAR peers (AR M = 57.92, SD = 16.07; NAR M = 74.77, SD = 12.00).

Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Expectations

8. Do AR students' perceptions of their teachers' expectations differ from NAR students?

Data on AR and NAR students' perceptions of teachers' expectations were gathered using the "My Teacher Thinks I Am..." section of the Shapiro (1993) activity. The purpose of this activity was to generate quantitative data on students' perceptions of positive teacher expectations.

A one-way ANOVA between-groups design failed to reveal a significant effect for group, F (1,24) = 3.46; p = .07 (AR M = 23.00, SD = 2.8; NAR M = 21.15, SD = 2.23). AR students' scores on both sections of the Shapiro perceptions activity seemed to cluster in the high (positive) end. To investigate this, an additional analysis was conducted on data gathered on AR students' perceptions of self (PS) and teachers' expectations (TE) using both sections of the Shapiro (1993) activity. The assumption of normality for difference scores was not met; however, the assumption of homogeneity of variance for the criterion was met for this analysis.

Analysis using a paired-samples t test did not reveal a significant difference between mean levels of scores, $t(12) = -.054$; $p = .56$ (PS M = 22.54, SD = 3.41; TE M = 23.08, SD = 2.98). Results indicate that AR students perceive positive teacher expectations and see themselves in a positive light. Results obtained should be interpreted with caution due to the violation of the assumption of normality.

Instructional Accommodations

9. What teaching methods do general education teachers use to accommodate students identified as at risk for the development of SED?

8 of 13 teachers in the sample completed the Instructional Accommodation Component (IAC) in The Instructional Environment Scale (Ysseldyke & Christenson, 1994). The purpose

of the IAC was to gather information on teachers' classroom practices in making accommodations for AR students. Of the teachers not completing the component, three stated that it was "too much paper work", one teacher stated that "all her students were taught the same thing, the same way", and one teacher stated that she has a "sink or swim" educational philosophy for her students.

For teachers completing the component, responses to questions on current practices, physical arrangements, effective strategies and needed accommodations indicate the following common themes for accommodating AR students in their classroom:

1. Current Instructional Practices: 1-1 instruction (when possible) and peer assistance (e.g., tutoring, modeling and pairing).

2. Physical Arrangements: student seating (e.g., seated alone, near the chalk board, and next to a "smart, quiet" peer).

3. Effective Strategies: extra practice and/or time, tangible rewards and/or verbal praise.

4. Needed Modifications for Student: smaller class or special class placement, and counseling.

Question 9 in the component asked teachers to select yes, maybe, or no if listed accommodations were feasible for AR students in their class. Teachers' responses to this question were reviewed separately and indicate the following for AR students in these teachers' classrooms:

1. Changes in tasks, materials or teaching methods are unfeasible accommodations;

2. Change in goals may be a feasible accommodation; and

3. Change in feedback procedures and extra practice are feasible accommodations.

Summary

In examining differences between children identified as at risk (AR) for the development of SED and not-at-risk (NAR) peers on selected classroom factors, results indicated the following:

1. AR students were generally rejected by their teachers while their NAR peers were not and also were perceived by their teachers as having significantly less ideal pupil attributes than their NAR peers.

2. AR students received significantly more teacher feedback statements than their NAR peers during classroom observations of teacher-student interactions. However, teacher feedback statements to AR students were significantly more negative or neutral, and non-academic in nature than teacher statements to NAR peers.

3. AR and NAR students did not differ significantly in the number of student-initiating behaviors or in the number of public response opportunities during classroom observations of teacher-student interactions.

4. AR and NAR students did not differ significantly in the number of initiating or receiving interactions from peers during classroom observations of peer social interactions.

5. AR students spent significantly less time academically engaged than their NAR peers.

6. AR and NAR students did not differ significantly in positive perceptions of teachers' expectations. Additionally, results indicated that AR students do not differ significantly in their positive perceptions of self and positive perceptions of their teachers' expectations.

7. Current methods used by teachers to accommodate AR students in their classroom include: 1-1 instruction (when possible), peer assistance, seating arrangement (alone, paired with peer or near the chalk board), extra time and practice, tangible rewards, and verbal praise. Additionally, teachers generally rated changes in tasks, material and teaching practice as unfeasible accommodations, and change in feedback procedure and extra practice as feasible accommodations for AR students their classroom.

Summary of Main Findings

The purpose of this study was to investigate classroom dynamics as they relate to young children identified as at risk (AR) for the development of SED as compared to their not-at-risk (NAR) peers. Areas investigated included: (a) teacher factors (i.e., teacher attitudes and perceptions), (b) classroom interactions (i.e., student-teacher and peer social interactions), (c) student factors (i.e., academic engaged time and students' perceptions of teachers' expectations), and (e) instructional factors (i.e., accommodations made by teachers for AR students).

Results indicated that AR students, on a variety of factors identified as important in this study on classroom dynamics, experienced a markedly different reality in the classroom than their NAR peers. Four major findings emerged from this study to support this conclusion. First, AR students were generally rejected by their teachers while their NAR peers were not. Additionally, teachers perceived AR students in their classrooms as having significantly less ideal pupil attributes than NAR peers. Second, AR students received significantly more negative or neutral and non-academic teacher feedback statements than NAR peers. Third, AR students spent significantly less time academically engaged than NAR peers. Fourth, despite that AR children were significantly less involved in academic tasks, teachers made few accommodations for these students in their classroom and were generally resistant to making adjustments in tasks, materials, or teaching methods to meet individual needs of AR students.

As important as the findings that show significant differences between AR and NAR

students are the findings that show no significant differences between groups for AR and NAR students. AR and NAR students did not differ significantly in the number of initiating or receiving social interactions from peers or in their positive perceptions of teachers' expectations. Additionally, AR students did not differ on their positive perceptions of self and positive perceptions of teachers' expectations.

Implications of the Findings

This section will present implications of the findings with respect to (a) teacher attitudes, perceptions and classroom interactions, (b) students' academic engaged time and instructional accommodations made by teachers for AR students, (c) peer support, and (d) students' perceptions (i.e., of teachers' expectations and self).

Teacher Attitudes, Perceptions and Classroom Interactions

The findings indicated that first- and second-grade children, identified as at risk for the development of serious emotional disturbance and investigated in this study, seemed to engender negative teacher attitudes, perceptions, and teacher-student interactions. These findings support research in general education classrooms showing that students who conform less to normative standards of classroom behavior experience significantly more teacher rejection and negative teacher bias (Siberman, 1969; Good & Brophy, 1972; Wentzel, 1993; Tal & Babad, 1990; Jussim, 1991; Kolb & Jussim, 1994). This study's finding regarding teacher factors (i.e., attitude, perceptions and interactions) is important because negative teacher attitudes towards and perceptions of students generally emerge within the first few weeks of classes, tend to remain stable even after students display consistent improvement in behavior, and may significantly affect students' academic progress (Safran & Safran, 1985).

The general education classroom is a complex environment "where events happen rapidly and without much time to think, teachers must cope with several students who are raising their hands, making appeals, daydreaming, and so on" (Silberman, 1969, p. 406). Given the complexities of the classroom, it may be that teachers are not aware of their differential attitudes and behaviors towards AR students in their classrooms. Effective classroom interventions for young children, especially those at-risk for behavior problems, should include components that: (a) target negative teachers' attitudes towards and perceptions of these children, (b) increase teachers' awareness of behaviors (i.e. feedback statements) towards these children, and (c) increase positive and academic teacher feedback statements to these children. Additionally, because of the stability of early negative attitudes and perceptions formed by teachers about students in their classrooms, interventions for these children should be implemented early in the school year.

Academic Engaged Time and Instructional Accommodations

The AR children in this study spent significantly less time academically engaged than NAR peers. However, few, if any, instructional accommodations were made for AR children by their classroom teachers. The unfortunate implication of this finding, supported by research, is that students who are less involved academically may become passive learners who give up easily on academic tasks, become anxious, withdrawn and/or angry about their school experience and fail in later grades (Mercer, 1992; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Regardless of ability, students who are unable to sustain attention on academic tasks will have problems learning (Zentall, 1993). Modification of instructional arrangements in the classroom to increase the amount of time a child spends academically engaged is critical in

promoting the current and future academic success of young children. For first- and second-grade AR children investigated in this study, the initial lack of time spent academically engaged may begin to lead to early learning deficits, which in turn, may lead to significantly large differences in academic proficiency if allowed to accumulate over time. Instructional environments that fail to meet the needs of children who exhibit difficulties early in their educational careers can lead some children to "tune-out or act-out" (Kolb & Jussim, 1994) and can lead to failure in later elementary grades.

General education teachers are capable of assessing students' individual needs and predicting student achievement (Brophy, 1983; Jussim, 1989; Jussim & Eccles, 1992). Additionally, general education teachers have indicated a positive regard for the desirability of instructional and environmental accommodations (Schumm & Vaughn, 1991). However, for teachers in this study, neither accurate prediction of needs nor positive regards for instructional accommodations translated to actual classroom practices. This was particularly salient for children in this study with behavior problems. The teachers of the AR students in this study most often felt that their classroom was not the appropriate placement for these students. This attitude is not unusual given the past emphasis on special education placement. However, the current trend toward inclusion and provision of services within general education classrooms requires that classroom interventions be developed for these children. For AR children in this study, these interventions must focus on increasing the time these students spend academically engaged and improving academic productivity. Possible strategies that may be implemented with these children include: (a) reducing task requirements and assigning tasks commensurate with student's ability level to increase

student's rate of task completion and success experiences, (b) monitoring progress by frequent direct, positive and academic teacher feedback statements, (c) giving explicit and direct instructions before task assignment and repeating instructions, and (d) rewarding students for task completion. Additionally, interventions should be developed in conjunction with the general education teacher. Teachers must be consulted when developing interventions, trained in the intervention process, and be committed to helping and having these students in their classroom. Research is just beginning to address the feasibility issue regarding successful classroom accommodations for students with special learning and behavioral needs.

Peer Support

Results of classroom observations of peer social interactions indicated that AR children were not significantly different from their NAR peers in the amount of initiating or receiving social interactions. AR children in this study seemed to be socially accepted by their peers. This is a positive finding for AR children in this study because peer social acceptance is a strong predictor of positive student outcomes (Wentzel, 1991a, 1991b). Children who lack friends in school may feel isolated and rejected (Wiener, 1987), may face serious social adjustment problems (Asher & Dodge, 1986), and may have decreased opportunities to enhance learning in the classroom through peer support (Wentzel , 1991b).

Because AR children in this study seemed to be accepted by their peers, it follows that classroom interventions for these children should build on this peer support. Interventions that involve concepts such as peer tutoring and cooperative learning should be explored and teachers should be encouraged, trained and directed to utilize effectively peer tutoring and positive peer interactions for AR children.

Students' Perceptions

Results of this study indicate that AR children were not yet aware of negative teacher regard and behaviors. AR children did not differ significantly from NAR peers in their positive perceptions of teacher expectations. Additionally, AR children did not differ significantly in positive perceptions of self and teacher expectations. These findings are supported by research which indicate that children's self-perceptions of competence "are close to maximum in early elementary grades" (Stipek & Mac Iver, 1989, p. 521). It is critical to help children, particulary young children identified as at risk for the development of serious emotional and behavior problems, maintain the positive perceptions self and teachers' expectations because research indicates that negative attributions influence student behaviors (Ames, 1978; Marsh, Craven & Debus, 1991), and student achievement (Brattesani et al., 1984; Braum, 1976; Dusek & Joseph, 1983; Weinstein, Madison & Kuklinski, 1995).

It is important to note the positive perceptions of self and teachers' expectations of AR children in this study and to provide interventions that build upon these perceptions. If AR children continue to do poorly in their general education classroom, they will have difficulty maintaining their positive perceptions of self and teachers' expectations, which, in turn, will exacerbate their current behavioral difficulties and may lead to poor educational outcomes.

Summary of Implications

In sum, several significant findings have emerged from this study. Young at-risk children in this study have not yet been identified by the school as having behavior problems serious enough to warrant special education placement but, nevertheless, are exhibiting behavior problems in the classroom to the extent that their teachers behave differently towards

them compared with not-at-risk students. These at-risk students are having experiences similar to students with disabilities in general education classrooms such as (a) rejection by teachers, (b) decreased perception of ability by teachers and limited teacher expectations, (c) negative or neutral and non-academic teacher feedback, (d) less academic engagement and involvement in classroom academic activities, and (e) few instructional accommodations to meet individual needs. However, at-risk children in this study were still accepted by their peers and seemed blissfully unaware of negative teacher attitudes, perceptions and expectations. Taken in concert, these results suggest a "window of opportunity" for effective classroom interventions that address the learning and behavior problems of these children before peer rejection and negative teacher bias have a direct effect on their school outcomes. Implications for effective classroom interventions for these children include: (a) targeting teacher attitudes, perceptions and behavior, (b) increasing academic engaged time, (c) utilizing peer support, and (d) maintaining positive perceptions of self and teacher expectations.

Suggestions for Future Research

Results of this study support the notion that assessment of learning environments (e.g., attitudes, perceptions, classroom interactions and instructional accommodations) for young children with behavior problems may be critical in understanding classroom variables that may significantly affect children's behaviors. This understanding may lead to the development of more effective and efficient classroom interventions for these children. Future research should focus on the following:

1. Developing sound ecological assessment models that are feasible for general education classroom use in order to increase understanding of factors in the classroom that may negatively impact students with behavior problems;

2. Sharing information, in an effective and efficient manner, with general education classroom teachers on data gathered on their students with behavior problems using ecological classroom assessment models, particularly if we wish to improve outcomes for students at risk for developing SED; and

3. Translating information gathered with ecological classroom assessment models on children with behavior problems into instructional practices that their general education teachers can and will implement.

In sum, teachers provide leadership and direction in classrooms; their involvement is crucial for successful classroom innovations of any kind. Children and their positive educational outcomes are the reasons for the existence of both teachers and classrooms. To translate research in general education classrooms for young children identified as at risk for the development of serious emotional disturbance into classroom practice, it seems imperative to orchestrate the following:

1. Examine and identify classroom factors that may be magnifying and/or sustaining these children's behavioral problems;

2. Develop classroom accommodations for these children that are grounded in information derived from the ecological assessment process; and

3. Involve classroom teachers in both the assessment process and the development and implementation of effective and efficient classroom interventions for these students by providing useful ongoing training and support for teachers.

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